



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

CHARM

Esther Lyon's definition of a lady, in George Eliot's *Felix Holt*, seems to sum up the popular conception of what is ladylike. It comprehends the idea of delicacy and moderation. "A real fine lady," says Miss Esther, "does not wear clothes that flare in people's eyes, or use importunate scents, or make a noise when she moves: she is something refined, and graceful, and charming, and never obtrusive." Though later Esther Lyon's mind awoke to a new sense of values, in her estimate of womanly refinement and grace she was right from the beginning, instinctively right.

In woman, charm always accompanies exquisiteness of some sort. The exquisiteness which we call daintiness seems the natural attribute of a lovely woman. We look upon it as the outward expression of an inward fineness. To be sure, this inward delicacy may sometimes be a kind of selfishness, as it was, I suppose, in the case of Rosamond Vincy.

To say that charm never dwells with bulk would be both unkind and untrue, no less so than to assert that the extremely thin woman can never be altogether charming. There is, however, one dictum that can safely be pronounced,—a thick voice and slovenly speech absolutely nullifies what otherwise might be charm. Of that "excellent thing in woman" too much has been said to warrant any under-valuing of the soft voice and the clear, fluent utterance.

A touch of audacity may be very charming; even waywardness is not inconsistent with charm; but charm can have no affinity for uproariousness, no alliance with what is unfit. Hence our revulsion at the sound of a rough, coarse, vulgar laugh; our desire to run away from the person who can do nothing without fuss; our disgust at the untimely joke; our shrinking from any inopportune facetiousness; our silent reception of a stupidly flippant remark. There is danger, however, in over-fastidiousness. We must not lose hold of that volatile thing which is perhaps the most essential element of charm,—spontaneity. This quality implies quick perceptions; and quick

perceptions are the roots from which spring kind deeds and right words.

Where beauty and daintiness abide, the slightest grace—indeed, almost any pleasant individuality—becomes charm, a peculiar, fascinating droop of the eyelids, it may be, the sign, perhaps, of a quiet drollery, or mocking humor. I know a family to which a peculiar, expressive wink is characteristic, the eyes being gray with long, dark lashes. The trick is purely emotional, and charming beyond belief.

There is a species of humor that is very charming. It's a kind of humor that goes along with a homely face, a kind that homeliness seems to suit. The persons blessed with this sort of wit are always comfortable souls, easy to live with. They have a charm of their own, a charm that never stirs envy. Cheerfulness is commonly accounted an element of charm. It is indeed a desirable possession, and one that is sure to win friends. But cheerfulness is often shallowness, mere inability to foresee, a pitiable indication of a fundamental lack of development. To my mind, a fortitude that falls short of cheerfulness, under the complete apprehension of a misery and grief which the human frame and the human spirit cannot possibly sustain with anything more than patient endurance, is far more noble than a cheerfulness that does not comprehend. The cheerfulness of youth is always charming. It helps to keep the world normal. The lack of development which this kind of cheerfulness implies simply means a state of growth; it is not a lack from which one can rightly infer a constitutional deficiency.

But why attempt to describe or define a thing so elusive as personal charm? It is something we can see and feel, and yet the secret of its power is hidden from us. A living novelist of high repute has built up a story on this very theme, the value of personal charm. Her whole aim seem to be the glorification of charm. Her hero, who believes that every person, man or woman, should have a purpose in life, is won completely by a "decorative idler." The woman who possessed this subjugating quality was as different as possible from what he had always thought a human being should be. She was hard, self-centred, ironic; she was interested in nobody; and yet, in spite of this

indifference, this lack of tenderness, this lack of imagination, she was full of apathetic power; she was always, in any company, the focus of interest. She was charm embodied. There was magic within her. On the hero, alas, nature had bestowed no such power. "He was an angel, of course; he was good; but he was only that; there were no varieties, no graces, no mysteries. His very interests were as meagre as his personality; he hardly had a taste, except the taste for doing his best." So was he made—with all his wealth of love, a creature never to be desired. Oh, the cruelty of nature!

Reflecting thus on personal charm, my mind naturally becomes reminiscent. As I look back, I can hardly separate face from environment. I am made to realize how much of personality a man's house, or shell, may reveal. I am shown that even personal charm may be enhanced by a fitting background, just as, through the skill of a cunning goldsmith the color and brilliance of a diamond may be intensified. In this backward sweep of the mind, the setting that stands out most clearly is a little room (for small it was, though, thanks to lofty ceiling and great, wide-silled windows, neither stuffy nor cooped) wherein there was not one expensive thing. The wood-work was white paint; the walls were cream-colored; the carpet, an ingrain, was a silvery gray; the hangings and couch-cover were cinnamon brown; the pillows showed touches of yellow and pink and blue; the table (there was nothing so fine as a polished table in this little room) was covered with a cloth of rich crimson. I know not whether this combination of colors would meet the approval of a professional decorator; I only know that to my eye it seemed most harmonious. There were dainty sash curtains at the windows, with dotted swiss curtains looped back. And this little nest lives in my memory, enshrined in an atmosphere of charm.

Then I recall a cottage home that seems to me charming, first, perhaps, because of its exquisite neatness and its perfect simplicity and sincerity, there being neither shabbiness nor cheapness, neither poverty nor superfluity, but every comfort, with, however, an almost quaker-like plainness. The walls are lined with books, Greek and Latin and German, works theo-

logical and philosophical, historical and poetical, and, in a special case by themselves, the novelists. There is plain living and high thinking in this cottage home. There sweet civility obtains, and the refinement of well-employed leisure is felt.

One other home scene lives in my memory as an example of charm in habitation, though here I find it especially hard to consider the place itself apart from its associations. This interior is a living-room in a homestead farm-house. I believe the floor covering was a rag carpet; the chairs were most of them comfortable old-fashioned rush-bottomed rockers; I think there was a lounge against the wall at the back of the room. A few good pictures adorned the walls, for the family counted an artist among its sons. The windows looked out upon a sweep of far-stretching fields, with a shadowy line of woods along the horizon, and, standing alone in an open field, dark against the sky, a great dusky cedar. As I remember it, this room was never insufferably hot, even on the hottest days of summer. One felt so safe, and cool, and comfortable. To lie there in cool shade, and look out upon the green cornfields, glistening in the sunshine, seemed to me the consummation of idle luxury. There was waving corn in view, and there on the chimney-piece always a row of luscious, mellow-tinted, bloom-fresh fruit, hinting of heavily laden orchards not far away.

The houses of wealth often give impressions of stateliness and grandeur, not of charm. Still, a book-lined room, with deep chairs to sink into, a hearth fire, softly-shaded lights, and the gleam of polished wood, is a pleasant vision to remember, and constitutes even yet the usual picture of home comfort and content. It is well that we have those charming fireside scenes left us by the poets, our own Whittier, and in England Cowper, that extoller of quiet pleasures. While such home scenes remain pictured in the mind, we shall not altogether lose our love of fireside happiness; there will still be, even in these days of unrest and tumultuous activity, women whose presence seems—

. . . . the sweet income,
And womanly atmosphere of home. . . .

I come now to a consideration of what is charming in natural scenes. Ruskin points out that every Homeric landscape in-

tended to be beautiful is composed of a fountain, a meadow, and a shady grove. The modern ideal of natural beauty may be more inclusive, yet I believe that, even with us to-day, a scene, to be altogether charming, must possess these three features,—greenness, shade, and flowing water,—three things essential to human comfort. A water scene with a background of hills may be very lovely, but the loveliness is a “solemn loveliness.” Whether this touch of solemnity is consistent with the idea of charm is a matter of opinion. The power that a lovely hill or mountain view (I speak now of loveliness, not of grandeur) has over one to whom the love of hills has become a passion I should not define as charm: it is a deeper sensation, more thrilling, more momentous. No, for pure charm, I should turn to the sweet level stretches of some rich farmland,—

Deep-meadowed, happy, and fair with orchard lawns.

The sublime and the romantic one might have to travel far to find; the charming is often near at hand. Ruskin says, “If the attention is awake and the feelings in proper train, a turn of a country road with a cottage beside it, which we have not seen before, is as much as we need for refreshment.” I am not so sure but that a touch of domesticity, something to suggest the proximity of human dwelling, is needed to render a scene perfectly charming. The poet, in the midst of the picturesque, and where the charm of romantic association was not wanting, observed with delight the little plot of cottage-ground, and wreaths of smoke sent up in silence from among the trees. And when in his wandering he came upon a slip of lawn and a small bed of water in the woods, even though the spot seemed made by nature for herself, he thought of it as fit for man’s abode:—

And if a man should plant his cottage near,
Should sleep beneath the shelter of its trees,
And blend its waters with his daily meal,
He would so love it, that in his death-hour
Its image would survive among his thoughts.

According to Ruskin, it is only the modern European child who can know the charm of romantic association. The instinct to which it appeals can hardly be felt in America, he asserts.

It is true that we have no antiquities in the sense that Europe has. We have no acropolis, no forum, no Colosseum, no ruined abbeys, no mediæval castles, no marble palaces, no cathedrals of the Gothic age. Our monuments of antiquity are physical, elemental, wrought and hewed by no mortal hand, consecrated by no mortal touch; they are the slow-growing work of ages; they speak not of human toil and strife; man is as nothing in their presence. It is a matter of regret that Ruskin did not visit the American continent. I have often wondered what he would have thought and said of our Geysers, our Big Trees, our Grand Canyons. Here, surely, would have been a feast for his color-loving eye!

In literature it is such compositions as the *Essays of Elia*, George William Curtis's *Prue and I*, Mrs. Gaskell's *Cranford*, that one thinks of as charming, compositions characterized by a gentle pensiveness, a tender playfulness, a quaint humor, a sweet pathos; a sensibility which, while it suggests infinite depths, never becomes passion; a feeling that does but play upon the surface of things; a fancy that flits here and there, as a butterfly disports himself in the summer air, going far afield, it may be, but soaring always gaily and lightly, not from shallowness, but rather from the fullness of knowledge. One who has plunged into the depths breathes the air with a new seriousness, perhaps, but also with a new serenity. The common things of earth take on a new significance for him.

This element of charm will ever be one of the unreckoned forces. Embodied in the language of words, it becomes an influence too subtle to be consciously recognized, though precious beyond compute. Such productions as *The Superannuated Man*, *Blakesmoor in Herefordshire*, *Dream Children*, *Old China*, have a potency of their own. They make for sweetness and graciousness. They are like a gentle, restraining hand holding in check our misdirected energies, or like a kindly admonishing voice calling upon us to cease our "fretful stir unprofitable," bidding us look about upon what there is of beauty and goodness, upon what is thought-producing and joy-quickening.

Here again we find the charming closely associated with the

affections, with home things, early memories, early attachments, fondness for the familiar and the customary, as well as appreciation of the deliciousness of unexpected joys. There is nothing more charming in English literature than Charles Lamb's *Old China*, an essay which sets forth the joys of poverty, the blessedness of self-denial, and the preciousness of dearly-bought pleasures. Even Wordsworth's poem to the Green Linnet—perfectly charming in its joyousness and its whole-hearted responsiveness to the gay, careless, exultant, ecstatic spirit of the bird—owes much of its effectiveness to those home touches supplied by the words "sequestered nook," "my orchard seat," "cottage eaves." They give the poem its setting. Take from the composition its human interest and its homely background, and you divest it of half its charm.

In this practical and purposeful age, when every club woman is expected to be interested in current topics, and when even the uneducated and unthinking person aspires to seem *well-informed*, pure fact is the intellectual food most valued; the literature of knowledge is more in demand than the literature of power. I should not describe the literary taste of the times as discriminative of flavor. And yet I should hesitate to say that we have to-day no feeling for charm. The popularity of Arthur Christopher Benson's books would belie such a statement. Mr. Benson pours out his thoughts in a clear smooth flow of words that makes whatever he chooses to say delightful. Charm is still an irresistible power, in literature as in personality.

MAY TOMLINSON.

Plainfield, New Jersey.